

## ALASKA TELEHEALTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

September 29, 2000

9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

ANTHC Administration Building

Anchorage, Alaska

Council members present: Commissioner Karen Perdue, State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services; Paul Sherry, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium; Douglas A. Bruce, Providence Health System in Alaska; Representative Gary Davis, Alaska State Legislature; Mark Johnson, United Utilities (*Alaska Telephone Association representative*); Marilyn Kasmar, Alaska Primary Care Association; Jerome List, MD, Alaska State Medical Association; Commissioner Nanette Thompson, Regulatory Commission of Alaska; Mary Weiss, RN, Alaska Nurses Association; Peter West, MD, Premera Blue Cross.

Council members absent: Ron Duncan, GCI; Mark Hamilton, University of Alaska Fairbanks, represented by Denny DeGross; Jeff Jessee, Alaska Mental Health Trust; Edward H. Lamb, Alaska Regional Hospital; Tom Posey, AT&T Alascom; Alex Spector, Department of Veterans Affairs, represented by Hal Blair.

Participants present: Ron Adler, Gateway Center for Human Services (*via teleconference*); Kathe Boucha, Providence Health System in Alaska; Nina Brahm, Myers and Stauffer, LC; Terry Daniels, Kez'aani, LLC; Jared Duzan, Myers and Stauffer, LC; Rebecca Grandusky, Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation; Carl Hild, Institute for Circumpolar Health; Teri Keklak, State of Alaska, Division of Medical Assistance; Beth Landon, Alaska Center for Rural Health; Linda Lekness, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium-AFHCAN; Denver Lodge, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium-ACES; Vonne Mason, State of Alaska, Division of Medical Assistance; Michael Milette, ACS; Gwen Obermiller, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium; Ellen Provost, D.O., MPH, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium-AFHCAN; Mike Sfraga, PhD, University of Alaska Fairbanks (*via teleconference*); Anthony Zenk, State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services

Staff: Tom Nighswander, MD, MPH, Facilitator; Karen Mitchell, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium.

Guests: Josh Applebee, Consultant; William Applebee, Consultant; Greg Donhamz, Department of Veterans Affairs (Florida); Bryan Downs, Central Peninsula General Hospital; Rich Hall, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium; Michelle Jansen, State of Alaska, Division of Insurance; Bob Labbe, State of Alaska, Division of Medical Assistance; Jim Lamb, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium-ANMC; Larry Sutterer, PEIC; Leigh Thurston, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital.

The meeting began at approximately 9:45 a.m. with welcome by the Alaska Telehealth Advisory Council (ATAC) Co-Chairs and round table introductions.

### Introductions/Goals for the Day

Commissioner Karen Perdue, Co-Chair  
Paul Sherry, Co-Chair

ATAC Co-Chairs reviewed the meeting agenda and stated that today's meeting is mainly informational—review of current and future Council work.

Announcements: the Alaska Center for Rural Health will present a "Virtual" Rural Health Meeting Forum on October 6, 2000 to explore the potential for a policy and planning organization. The meeting will be held at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) Administration Building, Conference Rooms 311 and 312.

### Progress Report Since May Meeting/ ATAC 1999-2000 Report

Thomas S. Nighswander, MD, MPH, Facilitator

Dr. Nighswander reviewed Council activities since the May 12 meeting: workgroup member attendance at national telehealth meetings, implementation of the approved pilot projects, and production of the ATAC Final Report for FY 2000.

## National/International Meeting Updates

*Circumpolar Health/ Arctic Council - Norway*

*Commissioner Karen Perdue, Co-Chair  
Carl Hild, Project Coord., Inst. for Circumpolar Health*

On behalf of the Council, Commissioner Perdue and Carl Hild attended the International Congress on Circumpolar Health, in Harstad, Norway, June 4-9, 2000. Carl presented information on Alaska at the conference, with one whole day devoted to sharing papers. Carl noted that Alaska is not ahead of other countries—a common issue shared by attendees included provider acceptance and support. The International Congress meets every three years; the next meeting will be held in Newt, Greenland.

Carl Hild provided an update on Arctic Council activities since his presentation at the January Council meeting. The Alaska Telemedicine Project (ATP) has prepared a final report, which will be posted on the ATP website by mid-October, [www.arctic-council.org](http://www.arctic-council.org). The report includes findings in four general areas—physical infrastructure, training structure (providers), interoperability (a national committee is working on this), and community interface (support). The report also includes seven recommendations—training for health aides, focus on front-end users, buy-in, mechanism for virtual meetings, formation of five working groups within the Arctic Council, and geographic comparison of system applications in remote areas.

Shared that Dena Puskin, Director for the Office for the Advancement of Telehealth, is working on an international workshop on the evaluation of telemedicine in the Arctic; the workshop will be held in Anchorage, September 2001.

*Cybermedicine Test-Bed - NASA*

*Carl Hild, Project Coordinator, Institute for Circumpolar Health*

Carl Hild shared information regarding the NASA Cybermedicine Test-bed project—small systems using low bandwidth. The University of New Mexico and NASA have conducted a lot of work in this area. Alaska will be participating in the project to test the transport of information over long distances. Possible project focuses discussed: data chips (transmitting from patient directly to a computer for tracking), 3D options, and alternative medicine. The University of New Mexico is seeking key players, with a proposal out by the winter 2000. Dr. Nighswander, Dr. Stewart Ferguson, Kathe Boucha, and Leigh Thurston are linked with the project.

*Medicare/Medicaid Reimbursement – Washington, D.C.*

*Kathe Boucha, Director of International Telemedicine  
Providence Health System in Alaska*

Kathe Boucha and Teri Keklak attended the Telemedicine Reimbursement workshop in Washington, D.C., on July 21, 2000 (resources are available for review). It will be awhile before a decision is reached in regard to Medicare/Medicaid; the Council's Telemedicine Efficacy project will assist with this process. Discussion of Senator Jeffords pending legislation, S. 2502, "Telehealth Improvement and Modernization Act of 2000." The act states the following more clearly: who the providers are, what will be paid, and under what circumstances; there is still controversy however regarding store and forward and concerns with fraud (beyond software security issues).

*Regulatory Update*

*Commissioner Nanette Thompson, Regulatory Commission of Alaska*

Commissioner Thompson has been appointed to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Universal Service Joint Board, which is focused on rural issues. Shared that Alaska received 18% of the available Universal Service funding distributed under the rural health care program last year. The Commissioner stated that she will be working with Alaska telecommunications carriers to increase statewide bandwidth capabilities (funding is being sought to cover costs). Discussion of the FCC order to increase services to Indian country and Alaska. The Regulatory Commission of Alaska has an open docket to look at whether the entire state qualifies. The Council will draft a letter to support Senator Ted Stevens's office efforts to fund telecommunications infrastructure development in rural Alaska.

*Telepsychiatry - Portland**Beth Landon, Assistant Director, Alaska Center for Rural Health*

Beth Landon attended the National Association of Rural Mental Health conference, in Portland, Oregon, August 4-6, 2000. Conference highlights included discussion of the following topics: telehealth programs (growth leveling out), telemental health (largest telemedicine application in late 90's), reimbursement (25 states have Medicaid reimbursement for telemedicine), legal and ethical considerations (licensure, reimbursement, and confidentiality), and plain old telephone systems (POTS).

**ATAC Workgroup – ANTHC Sponsored Projects Updates***Telepsychiatry – High-Bandwidth Project**Ron Adler, Executive Director (via teleconference)  
Gateway Center for Human Services*

Gateway Center for Human Services, an operating department within the City of Ketchikan, was awarded the Telepsychiatry High-bandwidth project. Project Director Ron Adler participated via teleconference to provide an update. Gateway is utilizing a psychiatrist from Portland, Oregon to provide mental health services to children and youth in Metlakatla and Ketchikan (they will use micro high-bandwidth technology, tying into Ketchikan General Hospital's T1 line). Ten hours of evaluation are scheduled a week, in addition to once a month face-to-face visits. The project goal is to evaluate high-bandwidth use in providing youth services. Gateway received \$74,000 from ANTHC (Alaska Mental Health Trust monies) and is also contributing \$35,000 from a grant they received from a private foundation. Alternate funding is also being sought to continue efforts after project funding ends.

*Telepsychiatry – Low Bandwidth Project**Craig Cott, Medical Director, Eastern Aleutian Tribes*

In Craig Cott's absence, Dr. Nighswander provided an update on the Telepsychiatry Low-bandwidth project awarded to Eastern Aleutian Tribes. The project is being modeled after the Department of Corrections and is utilizing videophones (multiplexing—four telephone lines, may be tested in the future) for better picture resolution. Noted that several of the communities participating in the project are experiencing videophone voice and picture coordination problems; EAT will work on getting the technology working properly before terminating the project. EAT received \$25,000 from ANTHC, and is contributing \$100,000 to the project.

*Telemedicine Efficacy**Terry Daniels, Project Director, Kez'aani, LLC*

Terry Daniels reviewed the purpose and goals of the Telemedicine Efficacy Trial project. Project staff plan to collect data from a minimum 250 consultations and will target the goal of 500. To date, three web-based survey forms have been drafted (the survey forms still need to be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board). Data collection will begin in October 2000, with the analysis completed by June 2001. The project has encountered problems with software security in regard to encryption; Terry has discussed this issue with Stewart Ferguson, Chair of the Technical Standards Workgroup. There was discussion of protocol issues in regard to specialties (not a project expectation) and non-intervention control groups (there will be no control groups).

*Medicaid Reimbursement**Jared Duzan, Project Manager, Myers and Stauffer, LLC  
Nina Brahm, JD, Project Consultant, Myers and Stauffer, LLC*

The Medicaid Reimbursement Policy Analysis project was awarded to Myers and Stauffer, LC. Jared Duzan and Nina Brahm, project staff from Myers and Stauffer, LC, reviewed project goals and deliverables. Highlight of discussion items included: survey questionnaire development, licensure issues, reimbursement (hub/spoke sites and rates), costs in providing telehealth services, telehealth prior authorization guidelines, and legislative issues. Noted that the Division of Medical Assistance office is open to participating in project efforts. The project amount awarded to Myers and Stauffer, LC, was \$70,000.

## Statewide Projects Updates

### *Alaska Distance Education*

*Mike Sfraga, PhD, University of Alaska Fairbanks (via teleconference)*

Dr. Sfraga participated via teleconference to provide an update on Alaska Distance Education Technology Consortium activities. University of Alaska Fairbanks President Mark Hamilton is the Consortium Chair; the Consortium includes representatives from 18 statewide higher education institutions. Commissioner Perdue is representing the Council; Dr. Nighswander is participating as staff. To date, Consortium meeting focuses have included the following: IT technology/infrastructure needs; federal and state policy and the broad affects; infrastructures and talent leveraging; work force training; and future technical support needs. Noted that the Consortium does not have an operating budget and a request has been made to Senator Stevens's office to establish an infrastructure which overlaps the Council's efforts. An initial report will be submitted to Senator Stevens in late November and will incorporate data collected by the Denali Commission. The next Consortium meeting will be via teleconference sometime in October with continued focus on IT infrastructure needs/gaps and brainstorming leveraging needs.

### *AFHCAN*

*Ellen Provost, D.O., MPH, AFHCAN Program Analyst, ANTHC*

Dr. Provost shared information for the comparison study she will be working on, "Post-Operative Follow-Up of Ear Tube Placements: Telemedicine vs. Standard Protocol." The study has two purposes: to find out if store and forward consult follow-up is an adequate replacement for the in-person visit and to review long distance rates over time in relation to maintaining telehealth infrastructures. The results of the study by Dr. Provost will be available for review. A request was made to clarify that Dr. Provost is not duplicating work already completed by the National Library of Medicine project.

AFHCAN updates included: Maniilaq and SEARHC beta site implementation moving forward, "Training the Trainer" instruction has begun, and staff are working on addressing software licensing issues (federally funded software development in regard to public domain). In addition, AFHCAN has prepared a sustainability RFP which will be available for distribution at a later date.

Other updates: the National Library of Medicine (NLM) project has received additional funding to expand the project. Also, Terry Daniels of Kez'aani, LLC, will be working with the Fred Pearce, PhD, to duplicate work completed by the NLM project in the private sector. The project focus will be ENT and dermatology.

### *Emergency Medical Services for Children's Telemedicine Project*

*Anthony E. Zenk, Health Program Manager  
State of Alaska, Dept. of Health and Social Services, CHEMS Unit*

Anthony Zenk shared information regarding the EMS for Children Telehealth pilot project. Funding is through the Bureau of Maternal & Child Health, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Curtis Production Services was awarded the project. The project began in April 2000 and will end in February 2002. The goal is to improve EMS capabilities for both Native and non-Native children by improving post-discharge care for children, where live video consults may be used; improving device-use and patient care; and facilitating rehabilitation follow-up. A request was made to coordinate EMS telehealth project activities with the Council's pilot projects so that efforts are not duplicated.

## Council Membership Review

ATAC Co-Chairs/Facilitator

Discussion of Council membership in regard to the addition of new Council members and alternate member participation. The following action was taken:

- A seat will be added for Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, with Leigh Thurston, ISD, serving as the representative.
- An invitation will be extended to John Ayers of ACS to attend the next Council meeting.
- Denny DeGross will serve as the representative for the University of Alaska Fairbanks.
- Council Co-Chairs will seek a legislative replacement for Representative Gary Davis's seat.

**2000 – 2001 Council Focus**

ATAC Co-Chairs/Facilitator

Discussion of what the Council would like to accomplish over the next twelve months. The Council's FY 2001 budget has \$130,000 available for additional projects. Council members agreed to focus on the following issues for the coming year:

- Telemedicine Efficacy—provider acceptance and support.
- Telemedicine Reimbursement (Medicaid/insurance)—get answers in order to make decisions for Alaska's interests.
- An expanded AFHCAN and what it would look like—communities, locations, and costs involved. Interconnect with one network to ensure that AFHCAN private sector integration will work.
- Sustainable telehealth network and structure—support for evolving structure.
- Interconnect ATAC and Alaska Distance Education Technology Consortium efforts.

**Upcoming Events**

The next Council meeting is scheduled to be held on January 5, 2001. Agenda item: Government Computer Patient Record (GCPR) introduction/update. For more information regarding GCPR visit, [www.gcpr.gov](http://www.gcpr.gov).